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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 000435

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SUBJECT: FOREIGN MINISTER MUDENGHE FULMINATES ON THE BBC,
MERCENARIES AND SANCTIONS

REF: HARARE 00417

Classified By: DCM REWHITEHEAD DUE TO 1.5 (B) AND (D)

1. (sbu) Summary. Foreign Minister Stanislaus Mudenge convened the diplomatic corps on short notice March 10, with the press in attendance. Mudenge's presentation began with a scathing attack on the BBC for a recent Panorama program, then moved on to the detention of a planeload of mercenaries, whom he warned faced capital punishment if found guilty. He next turned to the extension of EU and expansion of US targeted sanctions, which he claimed were intended to destroy Zimbabwe's economy and hurt the Zimbabwean people. Mudenge read a passage from the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZDERA) as purported proof and accused the U.S. of supporting foreign media outlets opposed to the GOZ. He concluded by blaming the United Kingdom for alienating Zimbabwe from the US and EU and insisting that it is everyone's duty to help the HMG and GOZ patch up their differences. It was vintage Mudenge -- sound and fury signifying nothing new. MFA staff passed out two handouts to the assembled diplomats and press, including one that made a clumsy attempt to link the USG to the seized aircraft. End summary.

Down with the BBC

2. (sbu) After wishing the assembled diplomats a happy new year and offering the view that things in Zimbabwe were getting better, Mudenge turned his attention to the February 29 edition of the BBC's Panorama program filmed secretly at National Youth Service Training Centers (more commonly known as Green Bomber schools in local parlance). He accused the documentary of conveying blatant lies about widespread abduction, rape, and violence at the centers, which he characterized as educational institutions. He insisted that the centers were unable to accept the hundreds of thousands of applicants clamoring for entrance and said that everyone was free to question chaplains, matrons, nurses and police about what went on in the centers. Warming to the subject, he observed that the "vicious lies" of the BBC were coincident with the meeting of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva and were intended to pressure the English cricket team not to travel to Zimbabwe. He concluded that the BBC should be ashamed. He cited other articles in the UK press attacking Mugabe and his wife, terming them orchestrated falsehoods intended to tarnish Zimbabwe's image, "consciously written to create a certain negative impression." A handout expanded on this theme.

Death to Mercenaries

3. (sbu) Mudenge next addressed a "more serious" topic, the seizure of an aircraft and the detention of 64 (he said 67) men among whom there were "known professional mercenaries." Mudenge said that there was evidence that the group had planned to support a coup attempt against the government of Equatorial Guinea before redeploying for a second operation in the DRC. He explained that the GOZ had acted under an OAU protocol on mercenaries that the GOZ ratified in 1992 that requires signatory governments to act against mercenary forces transiting their territories. He continued that while the GOZ would respect the rights of the detainees, they would be subject to the severest penalties, including capital punishment, if found guilty. Mudenge cited the evil of diamonds that had damaged DRC, Sierra Leone and Angola and said that he feared the evil of petroleum might wreak similar havoc in the Gulf of Guinea.

4. (sbu) Mudenge did not touch on who, or what country, might have supported the operation, but a handout (that we have faxed to AF/S) provided the names of some of the purported mercenaries, the nationalities of those detained (all from SADC countries), and the itinerary of the aircraft from South Africa. The handout also implied that the seizure of the aircraft was a set-up triggered by earlier attempts by two of the detainees to purchase arms and ammunition from

Zimbabwean sources. The handout also contained the following passage: "The US registered plane was a former US Air Force aircraft. It was then sold to Dodeson (msp) Aviation of the US, a company with links to the US Government." In a question and answer session following Mudenge's presentation, the DCM challenged Mudenge on this, asking on what basis this assertion had been made. Mudenge hedged, saying that this was the outcome of initial inquiries.

Down with Sanctions

15. (sbu) Mudenge next turned his attention to the recent EU decision to extend/expand sanctions, along with the US. He called this action misguided and said it showed "hate of ordinary people in Zimbabwe." While the EU and US hypocritically pretended that the sanctions were targeted, they were in truth intended to harm the ordinary Zimbabwean. He said that denial of balance of payment support could hardly be labeled anything other than a sanction and then read a passage from ZDERA Section 4(c) opposing USG support for multilateral lending to or bilateral debt reduction/cancellation for Zimbabwe. He said that while the authors of sanctions claimed GOZ mismanagement had put the Zimbabwean economy in its current plight, the fact remained that there was a concerted effort to destroy Zimbabwe's economy.

Public Enemies Number Two and Number One

16. (sbu) Mudenge commented briefly on the US and UK, in that order. He read from Section 5.(a)(1) of ZDERA on supporting an independent and free press and electronic media in Zimbabwe and said that the GOZ knew that the USG had provided support to Studio Seven (VOA) and Radio Short-wave Africa, two foreign based broadcasters that spewed out anti-ZANU-PF and pro-MDC propaganda on a daily basis. The reality was that before outsiders insisted on talking about human rights in Zimbabwe, they needed to talk first about outside interference in Zimbabwe's internal affairs. The crux of the problem, he insisted, was the UK's refusal to honor commitments made at Lancaster House. Until the strained relations between the GOZ and UK were repaired, the issue of Zimbabwe and its unfair international isolation would not go away. He called on Africans and Europeans and North Americans to pressure both the GOZ and UK to resolve their differences -- otherwise this contagion between Africans and Europeans would spread "like AIDS." In the nearest thing to a concession, Mudenge said that the situation would be resolved when the GOZ and UK "act like grown ups." He concluded with a bizarre non sequitur, saying he was unsure whether his final word should be the quote from Gone With the Wind -- "Let the dogs bark, the caravan has moved on" -- or Clark Cable's words -- "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn."

Comment

17. (c) With the exception of the remarks on the detained mercenaries, this was vintage Mudenge hyperbole and repetitions on tired themes. It was mildly noteworthy that he admitted that Zimbabwe was in difficult economic straits, and there was the faintest echo of concession in his call for the world to straighten out things between Zimbabwe and the UK and for these two -- not just the UK -- to try and work things out. Beyond this, however, his bombast and posturing did nothing to set the tone for reconciliation. Not surprisingly, he quoted ZDERA out of context, and the language in the second handout that attempted to link the USG to the aircraft seized in Harare was the most direct effort yet by the GOZ to misuse this incident for propaganda purposes. We do not know if Mudenge cleared this language in advance but note, to use his own phrase, that it was "consciously written to create a certain negative impression."
SULLIVAN